Interview with Lisa Manfull Harper

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Foreign Service Spouse Series

LISA MANFULL HARPER

Interviewed by: Kristie Miller

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Q: This is Kristie Miller. I am interviewing Lisa Manfull Harper on April 19, 1990, at my home in McLean, Virginia.

Lisa, your father, Melvin Manfull, was in the Foreign Service. He went in in 1954?

HARPER: I think he entered in the late 1940s, after the War. He was sent to Paris after the Palous Rose Conference of 1952. He came home one day in Washington, told us we were going to Paris; and this is where my career as a Foreign Service daughter began. I was six. We took one of the old PanAm Clippers, I think they were called Constellations, with sleeping berths. From the day we arrived in Paris my parents determined that we were going to be little French kids.

This was something that caused us some problems later on, because English wasn't really part of our daily activity.We settled into an elegant apartment in the l6th arrondissement, on Avenue Victor Hugo. My mother hired a former French actress, Mme. Fournez-Gafour, to give us French pronunciation lessons. So we started going to the park with Mme. Fournez learning French. A few weeks later, school began and after consulting with friends my parents put me into l'Institut Marie Auxiliatrice, a French convent school. I was the only foreigner and as a matter of fact the only non-Catholic.

I was also not quite a French-speaker then and it was very difficult. The children were not kind to me. My parents would just say, “Oh, it's okay, it's okay,” and then I would say, “Oh, they call me a little snot-nose.” And my mother would say, “Oh, you must have misunderstood.” (she laughs) In any case, the French teachers just had no idea how to take care of me. I just had to try to cope with them. They said the only other foreigner was Chinese but she had spoken French. So I just sat in the back of the room and had our afternoons with Mme. Fournez until I learned French. Then I decided that I would beat them at their own game. In French schools, if you do well, if you're the first in the class, you're decorated like Napol#on (she laughs). So I made sure I got one of three decorations. If you scored on everything, then you got to wear something that looked like the Legion of Honor, with a great big red band. We were really isolated from the American community. My parents met a lot of French friends and just decided that they were going to immerse themselves in French culture.

Q: Why did they make such a decision?

HARPER: I don't know. (she laughs) But my brother didn't like it, and after one year with the Jesuits he said he was an American and he wanted to go to the American School. But I stuck it out and spent three years at the Catholic convent school. After that — I was so tired, there was three or four hours of homework every night and too much pressure, that I put on myself, really, to be Number One and to beat the little French kids at their own game — my parents put us into La Petite Ecole Nouvelle, which was an experimental school at Saint Cloud. It was supposed to be an American model but it really wasn't: we spent one hour playing in the woods every day, and we had art and music classes, and we really never did much work. After our two years there my parents finally realized that things were not going well — I mean, we were having a great time — so then upon consultation again with their French friends, they put me in the Couvent des Oiseaux, which was the most prestigious French convent school. At that school they decided that I would have to take remedial English lessons. (both laugh uproariously) I thought my English was pretty

good but they felt that I had a terrible accent, you know, because it wasn't British. Anyway, I went to that school until my parents were transferred back to the States. We stayed six years in Paris. My father was told that for his career “finally, you're going to have to leave.” He was working with USRO, which was the implementation of the Marshall Plan, working out of the Hotel Talleyrand. As my brother and I think back over those six years, we really never saw my father. We had this image of — my parents were these wonderful people that got dressed up at night, went off to cocktail parties, or they had their cocktail parties, and our role was really to be perfect little kids. We were told to come in, and I would show off my French, and maybe sometimes we would get to show people where the bathroom was. I remember getting into trouble once because I got tired of this and put up signs all over the apartment saying “W.C. this way.” (hearty laughs) We were always on show. We weren't allowed to do the things that kids would do. I remember also once I was racing my bicycle, I fell down, the pedal went into my leg, and my mother saying, “You're an American, show these French people that you don't cry, that you're strong, that you're brave.”

Q: What an immense amount of pressure!

HARPER: A lot of pressure to be perfect all the time. You were on show, you were representing, you were living completely away from your own culture. I really can't remember one occasion where we sort of connected with other Americans, you know. Little French girls were “my crowd.” You really never had just a spontaneous experience. If you wanted to invite your little French friends to come and play with you, your mother wrote a note to her mother. You couldn't play, there was no place to play because we lived in Paris. Sometimes I was just lonely and I'd go downstairs and I'd jump on my Pogo stick. And then people would come up to me, “French don't know Pogo sticks” and they'd come around and they'd talk to me. So I became a great reader. I had an arrangement with a local bookstore, there being no public library nearby, and I would just read books and trade them in. You know, I'm very glad that I learned to speak native French this way, it was a wonderful experience to be totally immersed in a foreign culture, but it made for a very

difficult time when I came back to the States, because I really didn't know who I was: was I a little French girl or was I an American?

Q: What kinds of problems did you encounter? You were twelve when you came back?

HARPER: Yes. My parents were — my father was going to be working for the Secretariat. He took a few months off to buy a house and restore it and paint it. We were off to Gonzales, Texas, population 6,000, to live with my grandmother, my mother's mother, who was a very conservative Southern lady with very different values from us; you know, not recently enlightened at all. We arrived there, we were little French kids. My brother had on his little Navy blue outfit and I had on my little gray suit and my little hat, and I remember on arriving making sure that my brother had his gloves on before he met my grandmother — (laughing)

Q: In Gonzales, Texas! Oooooh, boy... Did you have as hard a time there as you'd had in the French school?

HARPER: Very hard time. Well, actually, it was funny because the school system put me into an English class for Mexicans. That was fine with me because culturally I understood these people. These were Catholics, and even though I was Episcopalian I'd been to Catholic schools. These were people that had really the same sort of approach to life that I had. Much more fun-loving and open and free than the Presbyterian kind of background that my grandmother came from. But then my grandmother was upset that we were in this — it was somehow loss of face for her for me to be in this class. We just felt disconnected. I also found at age 12 my cousins were little women, you know — at that age they were out dating, they were dressed up in very tight toreador pants, I remember, and I still had my little French convent outfit and I was still very much a little girl.

We stayed there for it seems like three or four months, and this was really a breakthrough. I found too that the young people there who seemed to catch on to what we were experiencing was the pastor of the church — the pastor seemed to figure out that things

were not going well. My grandmother never did, she was just embarrassed, we were like creatures from outer space, we just didn't conform to what she wanted her grandchildren to be like.

Q: Your mother wasn't there —

HARPER: No. My parents were fixing up this house in Washington. Also at that point they weren't even willing to deal with it, and I think there was really very little recognition at that point of what it was to have had this uprooting and other background. Now, I understand, there are classes and support groups and all kinds of things for Foreign Service children who come back and are just completely out of phase. But in those days there wasn't. I must say, thinking back over my father, when we got back it was the same thing: we just never saw him. My mother was the one who raised us. She got pregnant at age 40, so that was another burden in our coming back to Washington. So we were really sort of adrift, and you felt in that atmosphere that you really couldn't talk about your problems of maybe adjusting or trying to figure out who were you and — I can remember thinking at that age "what American traits do I want to keep and what French traits do I want to keep." And I'd find that just even in terms of taste preferences it had all been molded by the French. I liked different things and different occupations. There was also a surface sophistication that I had — it didn't go very deep but it was there, and so it kept me sort of out of step with my own group in school. And then I skipped two grades. That kind of helped, in a way —

Q: Because then at least you were with people who were as sophisticated as you were.

HARPER: Yes, but also my parents decided to put me in public school, so I went to Woodrow Wilson High School. There were very few people — my best friend there was a girl from India, because there was somebody I could relate to. And there was a great desire on the one hand to conform, to be an all-American kid, but I couldn't do it.

Q: And you probably didn't want to give up.

HARPER: Didn't want to give up, because I thought that, you know, that I was me, but that if I had wanted to become one of the crowd, I would have had to give up some of this.

Q: Did you feel lonely?

HARPER: Yes, yes... But, puzzle, puzzle, “Why isn't this working? Why can't I make friends? Why don't I have dates like everybody else?”

Q: You probably scared them to death. (both laugh heartily) So you would find yourself drawn to somebody like the Indian girl, who was having the same problems.

HARPER: Yes. And another thing, too, that I missed in this Foreign Service life is that I wasn't connected to a family. It's not just the Gonzales family. My father's family came from Utah and when we'd go visit them we would just go and meet these apparitions for a few days and we really never knew them. There was just this great hunger to have a network of friends and family around. We were lucky to stay six years in Paris but you were still uprooted from your friends, and I found that my French friends that I continued to write with didn't understand me after a point, because I started writing like an American teenager and they were really just out of phase. So then those friendships sort of dwindled away because we were going in different directions. I had a chance to continue in French schools, my parents gave me that option but I did make the conscious decision that I was an American, that I needed to learn to speak and read and write English. The speaking came very easily because obviously we'd spoken English at home, but the writing was something else. One of the things that I really appreciated with my father, once he realized there was a problem, is that I would dictate to him my essays and tell him in French what I wanted to say, and then he would help me translate them into English. He was very good about that — when he was home, but he had a series of high-pressure jobs. He was working 17 or 18 hours a day, so he was just making cameo appearances. Q: I think that's

probably a very difficult feature of Foreign Service life for a lot of children — not only their fathers but when they're overseas their mothers are away at social functions that are seen to be necessary.

HARPER: Yes. My mother was always very active in Paris. She was an active volunteer, a very good organizer, a very good entertainer, and I certainly learned a lot from that. Her focus, at least in Paris, was in helping my father's career. Plus, we had nannies every day, we had a maid, so she really didn't have to worry so much about that. Actually one of the benefits of Washington for us was that she was there every afternoon when we came home. It was hard on her not to have a maid and the nannie(she laughs heartily) but at least she was there to talk to. I think really we started to get to know her, as children, there. My father we didn't get to know until much later.

Q: What were the advantages to you of being a Foreign Service child?

HARPER: Well, I think getting to know other cultures, handling yourself in social situations, once you learn one language there's a facility, you're not afraid you're going to be able to learn other languages. In Paris even though I have a hard time, I always considered myself a very privileged little girl. I can remember my seventh birthday: my Foreign Service friends brought over a cake in the shape of a hat, and a little bottle of champagne. And I thought, “Wow, I'm a lucky little girl.” (then laughing heartily) “American little girls don't get bottles of champagne!”

Q: And you felt you were lucky for living in France.

HARPER: Yes.

Q: Because you had to face so many challenges at such an early age, and because you faced them successfully, do you think that gave you a very high self-esteem? It certainly should have.

HARPER: I don't know. It probably —

Q: I mean, did you always see yourself as a person who could do what she wanted to set out to do?

HARPER: I never thought of it that way. What I thought of was that if I were going to succeed, I would have to fight. That was sort of my conclusion. “You're really going to have to struggle and fight and work extremely hard to achieve something.” Because that had been the history of Paris. It does give you a self-confidence that you know that wherever they drop you in the world you're going to be able to manage, you're going to be able to make friends, you're going to reach out for friends wherever you are because they're necessary to you. I think that on the whole the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The disadvantages being, I think, that you are robbed of a normal American childhood. I feel now that unless you come home for those crucial high school years, you may always be out of phase with your own society.

Q: You think that saved you?

HARPER: Yes, it really did help me. I still find even today in department stores and supermarkets, people will say, “You're French.” I've never lost that, and it's not that I've consciously tried to keep it but there's something about the way I look and talk and act that people who know us and look for us pick up.

Q: When I met you in college you had just come back from a summer job working as a translator for the State Department.

HARPER: This was one of those sweetheart deals that my father worked out. At that point I was bilingual in French, and I had very good Spanish, so my father had talked to a friend in Language Services and said, “Here's my daughter, would you like to hire her for the summer?”Well, I was hired, and at first I started translating documents. Then they realized I could do more. I was 16 years old so I was a little under-age for this. Then two of the

interpreters said, “We'll train you as a simultaneous interpreter.” So when they had free time they'd take me into the booth and I would train. I flunked the Spanish part because I just wasn't “native” enough, but I passed the French part and they said, “Why don't you go along as a foreign interpreter?” At that point the Administrative woman hit the roof. “My God, she's only 16, what's going to happen? We can't send somebody, we can't even pay somebody that age.” Then some people went to bat for me and I went along as the third person on the team. Andy Steigman, who later became an ambassador, was the head of the team. Then we had a wonderful old interpreter named Klugman or something like that, who spoke ten languages. And then a group of Senegalese and some other West African students.

This was a marvelous time. Some of them were avowed Marxists who were trying to find a reason to leave the group after San Francisco, so they would try to get discriminated against in airports. And they'd be told, “Sorry, you can't be discriminated against. An airport is a federal property. There are laws against it — “ This was in 1962. So a bunch of them finally got kicked out of an American Indian bar in Phoenix, so they left the group. (laughter) The Indians didn't want me, either, but that didn't seem to bother them. This was a good experience. It also taught me that while I liked speaking French, I didn't like being an interpreter. You know, you felt like a machine, you were just sort of being “used,” and I realized that 12-hour days were a normal part of it, you were just expected to keep on translating. Also part of that job was you were sort of nursemaid, you were just watching out for them and making sure that everything went well— it was just not what I was looking for. I was offered a job by Language Services, they were very eager to have me. As a matter of fact, I also had been studying Russian and they said if I could get my Russian up, and if I had French, Spanish and Russian, I could have come on as a GS-13.

Q: At age 16?

HARPER: Whenever. They were willing to take me on. It was a good year, and I don't think that anybody ever knew how old I was, either. I had to be very careful in bars, because

they did “card” people and I was certainly under drinking age. And I had to watch out just that people wouldn't ask me about life experiences, because then too they would have realized. Strangely enough, years later in Senegal I met one of my students. I was trying to find our administrative officer's house way out on the beach in Dakar and I went into the wrong house. And here was this woman, bless her soul, who had been one of my students and she instantly recognized me, and she said, “Lisa!” and I said, “Vas-tu!” It was a total accident, what happened. That's another — one of the nice things about the Foreign Service, you do meet people again, you're moving around enough so that if you wait long enough, you're going to find them. (both laugh)

Q: So, you got to college, and you won the Spanish prize your freshman year, and you majored in Mandarin Chinese. At what point did you think about joining the Foreign Service for yourself?

HARPER: Well, I really hadn't considered any other career. I didn't want to enter graduate school. I knew I wanted Federal Service. I found that my professors were very much against that. As a matter of fact, some of them felt that I wasted their time, not mine, not continuing on to graduate school. So there was tremendous pressure —

Q: Jimmy Wren?

HARPER: Not so much Jimmy Wren as the people — Jimmy Wren, this was one of my favorite professors, had set me up for a scholarship in graduate school at Yale, in Comparative Literature; this was another sweetheart deal, I could have walked right into it. I found that the professors at Yale really didn't like the idea that I was seeking government service. “Waste of time, why should we train you.” And then when I turned it down, my other professors at Brown were very disappointed. Because I'd turned it down, because I wasn't choosing academia.

Q: Although, given the fact that while we were at Brown, I for one never had a female professor, academia was not an attractive career in those days.

HARPER: Right. And then when I thought of the prospects of being a Chinese scholar, it just wasn't “active” enough. You know, people are important for me, and even though I enjoyed Chinese and I still love the language, it just wasn't what I wanted. So what happened was I graduated from college and had gotten the whole process started and was waiting for word as to whether I'd passed or not and would be admitted or not, I went off to Brussels where my father was DCM. At that point, one of the typical experiences: I arrived there, and the ambassador's wife, who was French, looked at me and said, “Ah, you're just the person we need. We need an American girl to make her debut.” (laughter)

Here I was, I was 21 or 22, I had graduated from college, and being a debutante really wasn't on my list of priorities. I was really in Brussels waiting to join the Foreign Service. I thought this was as good a place as any to wait, and I had signed up for Chinese at the local university and found a wonderful professor there, also started Japanese classes because I'd always wanted to try that. I had a life arranged, and here was this lady — so I went to my parents and said, “Look here, I really don't need to do this, do I.” And they said, “Oh, yes, we really need you, we don't have any other girl in the community who can do this, you must do it.”

Q: Why did they want an American debutante anyway?

HARPER: Because they had an international debutantes' ball —

Q: Oh! And you were going to be the representative.

HARPER: I was going to be the representative.

Q: Like Miss America.

HARPER: Right. So I put on my white dress, and I selected this very nice young man from the embassy, and they said, oh, no, he wasn't good enough, so they found me another man who — I don't know, probably looked better in a tuxedo. We were off and I was the debutante. And this is one of those Foreign Service things. The ambassador's wife was very French, very strong sense of what people should and shouldn't do, and she was the head of the embassy as far as she was concerned in the social things. To the point where she would call up my mother and me and tell us what to wear. “I am wearing a short skirt today and I am wearing my short Givenchy and I certainly don't want you to wear your shor[name of French designer] or your long —” Not that we had her kind of designer clothes, but anyway she was the kind of woman who said, “You will show up for bridge at my house at a certain time.” This was 1968, I think.

So, in any case, I became a debutante. As a matter of fact, I was on in Belgian movie houses because as it turned out I was the only one smart enough to learn the choreography of this event, which required walking up and down steps, curtseying, turning, waltzing —(she breaks up laughing). So I have a newsreel of me, my 15 minutes of Andy Warhol fame. There I was on TV screens throughout Belgium, Le Bal des D#butantes. I found the girls were very shallow, these Belgian girls really didn't have any professional aspirations, I had nothing in common with them. I was doing my duty, as my parents and as our ambassador felt that I should do.

Q: Which was the way it was done in those days. If you didn't do it you jeopardized your father's or your husband's career, that's right.

HARPER: There was no question. I would have had a very difficult time not doing it. So I did it. I also had a job in the admin section. It was a time when NATO was moving from Paris to Brussels. Another assumption was that certainly I would work in the embassy. I mean, everybody'thrilled to — and so I worked, I decorated apartments and made sure apartments had the right number of lamps and furniture, and put up terrible fiberglass curtains. That was my summer after graduation from college. That was 1967. I came back

in '68. I joined the Foreign Service in February '68. At that point I was told, “Oh, you speak wonderful languages. We need people to learn Vietnamese.” So I went to FSI to learn Vietnamese. I wasn't thrilled about that.

Q: Hadn't you been in Vietnam visiting your father?

HARPER: Yes. I'd had two really incredible summers in Vietnam, and these are some of the high points of my life, really. My dad was political counselor then. He was a friend of Fritz Nolting, a very close friend. Nolting was the ambassador who had supported Ngo Dinh Diem to the end, even after the policy was shifting. My father came in with Ambassador Nolting and within three months the whole situation in Vietnam had changed. Diem was overthrown and killed, then we had a series of military coups and short lived governments. My father inherited a Political section of people whom he'd been told were sort of retreads and problem cases and they turned out to be absolutely outstanding officers. It was fun, too, to have met them when they were junior officers, and now all these people have gone on to be ambassadors. Really an extraordinary group of people.

We lived at 6C Tu Kuong in a wonderful old French compound with high walls and floors made of wonderful old tiles. We had the only swimming pool in the compound. There, again, it was a round of very interesting parties. In Saigon in those days you still had a lot of French influence, you had soldiers of fortune, you had the American press making its name — Neil Sheehan, David Halberstam — all these people would call my father at two or three in the morning asking for information or confirmation, whatever they were looking for. They would drop by the house.There were a tremendous number of Vietnamese coming by the house. Some of them turned out to be working for the Viet Cong all along. I always watch Vietnam retrospectives on TV to see whom I know. (laughing) “Oh, yes, I remember her!”

Q: At this point you were old enough so that you went to the parties, you were an adult participating —

HARPER: I can remember having a real fight with Joe Alsop about the Chams, they being a Muslim minority. I also had some adventures. I remember once a friend of mine had introduced me to a girl my age. I really hadn't thought much about her — this was in my first summer there — and she said, “Come and join my family iHue.” So I went down to Hue, which is the ancient capital of Vietnam in central Vietnam. And I said, “Gee, these people live well.” There was a brother who was an archbishop; the mother lived in a traditional Vietnamese house with marvelous carved wooden beds, no mattresses. She presented me with a bowl I still have which was “bleu de Hue,” a special blue and white porcelain made in Hue that's a museum piece. We just had a marvelous weekend. A few months later I was looking at pictures of the Diem family and realized that my hostess had been the sister of the president. Nobody had told me this. What this girl and I had in common, I think, was our age and also that we'd gone to different branches of the same convent school. She also invited me to visit her uncle, Mr. Nguyen Van Bou. He turned out to be the Saigon cinnamon king. He gave me lectures on how monopoly was the only way to go, free-trade competition is no good. (she laughs) He was immensely wealthy, so when he invited me and my friends, my pal really, to go up to Cap San Jacques, which is the beach resort, he deployed his private army in tanks along the road so that two young girls could not be threatened in any way. So we were zooming along the road and here were these tanks advancing.

Q: Oh, good grief.

HARPER: We also got to go into parts of — my father was very upset, every time he'd hear these adventures he was about ready to lock me up. He'd hear about them afterwards!Then we got to Mr. Bou's villa and we found that he had two matching villas, one for the east wind, one for the west wind, absolutely identical down to the last jar and pot. Depending on the prevailing wind, we would just shift.

Q: This was religious, or — ?

HARPER: No, just a whim of his. One would be cooler when the wind was blowing. In any case, he was a fascinating character, really worth knowing. I also met a Caodai General. At Brown I had written a paper on the Caodai, they were a political religious sect, and they had their own private army too in those days. They had an absolutely marvelous temple down in Tay Ninh Province where they had all of their saints in life-size statues. Joan of Arc and Victor Hugo are two of their saints. (laughter). I decided I really had to go and see this Caodai temple. So I persuaded one of my father's junior officers to drive me to the airport; this was loosely coordinated with my father. I convinced this Caodai general that I was a world expert on Caodais. He had a thousand of his faithful assemble for me to talk to. I had written my whole speech on the Caodai religion. It's really a crazy syncretic religion that borrows from everybody, with the army that gave them really political say in that particular context.

Anyway, I was ready to go down, man came to pick me up. Unfortunately, on the way to the airport, we realized that a coup was in process. He wouldn't drive me to the airport, and I can remember being furious. As 17- or 18-year-old, who cares if there's a coup going, I had a thousand Caodai waiting for me, (laughing) they can't do this to me!

Q: “My public!”

HARPER: My public is waiting. Anyway I guess he wondered what kind of an evaluation he'd get from my fathe(even heartier laughing by both) if he turned his daughter up in a little plane. I understand that the Caodai waited for three hours and finally went home. I missed out on that.I got a summer job working for the Social Welfare Group. It was an attempt to try to get the Buddhists and the Catholics together and see if they couldn't work out a social welfare policy. Unfortunately they hated each other and they wanted sort of an impartial person to travel with them and they hit upon me. I'm also sure they had an eye to the American embassy and pleasing them and also getting us involved in funding this effort. So in any case the job was mine and we had a chance to travel all around Vietnam to see what the Buddhists were doing, see what the Catholics were doing with orphanages

and other social welfare work. It was very primitive, and even in those days there were some children who were either half-French or half-Western and there were also some half-Black children —

Q: By the Americans.

HARPER: Well, no, I think they were left over from the Senegalese soldiers who'd served in Indochina. Anyway, they were always brought to us first, sort of “this is your charge.” I felt very sorry for them because they had no chance in that society.

Q: It was like Japan, they're very ethnocentric?

HARPER: Yes. So, I did that. And also managed to spend probably my only night in a whore house. We got to Hue and they said, “Well, we're going to be staying in a particular place that's no longer in business.” It was right next to the Perfume River, a lovely location. Went up to the first floor, and even though I was fairly innocent I looked in all these little cubicles and thought, “Hmmmm, what is this?” Well, in any case there were no girls around and that was just a place to spend the night. We went up to see the Domaine de Marie, which was a very nicely run Catholic social welfare organization. It gave me a chance, too, to see really how deep the religious conflicts were in Vietnam. Without somebody in between, the Buddhists and the Catholics simply weren't talking. It's very hard, actually, after a summer in Saigon, really an active, very stimulating summer, to come back to Brown. I took a year off my third year. Really what I needed to do was just to figure who I was and where I was going. It was probably the best thing I ever did, because I was just coasting. I think one of the things that a Foreign Service education does for you is that you can really put a good face on everything. I mean, you're taught to do that, your parents are too busy to really listen to your little problems, you always felt you're a representative of your government, you really can't let down.

Q: So you cover up your problems.

HARPER: You cover up your problems, you just cover them up —

Q: And you don't acknowledge them.

HARPER: No. Who are you going to talk to them about? There's nobody. I think if there had been other children, if I had met other children with whom you'd have the same experience, then it would have been a good idea just to talk it out. But there was nobody else in my particular situation, or at least nobody that I connected that I met.

So I took a year off and — well, it started out that we were going to visit my grandmother in Texas, a duty trip. My father had been sent to the UN to work on the non-admission of China — this sounds funny these day[1990], but in 1965 we were still trying to keep China out of the UN — and my father was told he'd be living in a hotel and couldn't bring his family, and the per diem really wasn't sufficient. We were in Gonzalez, Texas, and even my mother acknowledged that my grandmother was very difficult. So at that point I hatched a scheme to get out of Gonzalez and go down to Mexico and study Spanish.

I had a Brown classmate who was studying in Guadalajara and wasn't able to enter her program but I enrolled at the University there. My mother decided to join me — this hadn't bee(she laughs) part of the scheme but Gonzalez was getting to her, too. So we arrived, and as luck would have it, somebody right there in the line, “I know of a furnished apartment available for $70 a month, on Avenida Vallarta, which is the very best avenue in Guadalajara.” And we moved in. My youngest brother was with me but my other brother — the one who always said he was an American and didn't want anything to do with foreign cultures — spent a few more days with my grandmother, then hopped on a Greyhound bus and found us! To this day I don't know how he found us at Guadalajara; we had just moved in.

In any case, we had six wonderful months there. It was the first time that we had lived in a foreign country without the support of an embassy.

Q: And without the demands —

HARPER: Yes, and without the obligations. People were wonderful to us. We had some really marvelous encounters. You weren't “special” there, so you knew people were being nice to you not because you could get them a visa or because they had a message to transmit to the U.S. Government that would revolutionize the world, but just because you were you. So these were six wonderful months, and it was just what I needed, to kind of think through a lot of problems and get a grip on myself. And also, at Pembroke, the women's part of Brown University then, I never really sort of fit in and this period gave me the chance to “I don't really care.” I gained the courage to say, “I'm just going to be me and not worry about it.” Also it gave me a chance to work on Spanish.

During the time we were there I got a job teaching French at a local school. I returned to teaching later on, and enjoyed teaching and did well at it. Even though the students, who were expatriates, weren't very serious; some of them were smoking pot and would just fall out the window while I was teaching. (laughing) I would look over and half the class was gone.Anyway, it gave me a job and a purpose and I continued my studies. So it was six productive months. My father would come down and visit us once in a while when he could manage to get away from the UN. Then my father asked for the Imperial Defense College in London, which is a senior British staff college. Then he said, “Well, you've been out for six months, why don't you just stay out for six more months.” So we all moved to London and had a wonderful year. I think that's the first time that the family really came together and got to know one another. My father's workday was very light. The IDC was a gentlemen's school — you know, you showed up, pontificated until 3 or 4 p.m., had a glass of sherry and went home. We lived in Chelsea on Old Church Street in a wonderful old town house, had a chance to discover England and move around. We had a good year. The pressure was off there, too. There were no embassy responsibilities for my dad, no deadlines to meet, no ambassadors or staff to worry about. Then my father was sent to Brussels, as DCM. And I returned to Brown for my last year and finished up.

Q: At that point you had decided you wanted to be in the State Department?

HARPER: You know when I think about it, I really hadn't considered any other job. My two brothers, however, wouldn't have anything to do with this business, they never considered government. For me it just felt like the right thing to do and I thought it was what would take advantage of everything I'd learned. And I guess, too, there was some patriotism involved. I'd had on the whole a pretty privileged upbringing. I had learned a lot of things and in some way I should give it back, put it back into the system. So I joined the Foreign Service. I came to Washington and started studying Vietnamese. While studying Vietnamese I met the man I married. It turned out he was to be posted to Brussels, where — people then realized — his father-in-law was DCM! Then they decided to send him to Copenhagen.

Q: When you got married, how did that affect your career?

HARPER: At first, it didn't. Obviously the Saigon assignment was “out.” In those days, I found a tremendous sense of betrayal, the assumption that if you married, you weren't serious about your career; that they spent all this time selecting you, grooming you, training you, teaching you a language, and that you were never going to —

Q: A terrific double standard.

HARPER: Yes.

Q: They expected all the women to be single and all the men to be married.

HARPER: My feeling was that the women were expected to “take the veil.” That if you joined up, well, certainly not marriage; and not marriage too soon. I was married in September 1968. Here, again, a Foreign Service story: my husband and I had no money, we were just starting out, and my father insisted on a big embassy wedding.My parents had this idea that if their only daughter was getting married, it had to be a super-

production. I had a husband (from whom I'm now separated) who doesn't take well to these things, and it was an excruciating experience for him.

Q: Because he had not grown up in this ambiance, though he was by then in the State Department himself.

HARPER: We had little crisis after little crisis, really I think it affected the whole marriage. He arrived but didn't have the right kind of suit for the civil ceremony in Brussels. My father said he would not sanction the wedding unless it took place in Brussels, so we were married in Brussels. He also felt that it had to be his kind of wedding. My parents just took over this wedding —

Q: (laughing) Of course, that's not unique to the Foreign Service.

HARPER: No, it isn't! At that point, my parents were living in an absolute mansion, a wonderful house, and the reason they'd obtained it was that we had three different ambassadors accredited to Belgium — one to the country, one to NATO, and one to the EEC. One of them had taken the DCM's home. (End of tape)

-something even more splendid. So all right, here it was, and it certainly made a wonderful setting for a wedding. But it was September, my friends couldn't come, people had either begun school again or work, so we ended up with very few of our own friends there and 400 people that I never will see again.

Q: Because it became like a debutante party and an embassy function.

HARPER: It was an embassy function, and it was a duty function. I realized that people really didn't want to talk to me, this was just another nice embassy function done perfectly: civil ceremony at the Hotel de Ville with marvelous woman dressed in a tricornered hat officiating, then Melle van den Hoevel it became an affair of state, a tour of the Hotel de Ville; we had a man in knickers and a big silver mace (laughter) making noises with this

mace as we proceeded down the hall. In any case, David was horrified. My mother was upset because David hadn't brought the right color suit and shoes for the civil ceremony. If he'd been long in the Foreign Service he'd have known that a light suit wouldn't do, but he hadn't been, and being a stubborn person he wouldn't change. So this caused tremendous problems.

In any case, we were married there and couldn't be posted to Brussels, which was what he had prepared for. I think he was a bit resentful about this. Actually we hadn't even considered that though maybe we should have. So he was assigned to Copenhagen. I asked if there were a job there for me and was told there would be no job at all. So I had to resign. This was very tough on me, because I had just started my career.

We arrived in Copenhagen, and being the daughter of a rather senior officer I'd been used to being well treated and greeted. The couple sent to the airport to meet us didn't even want to talk. They just dropped us off at the hotel that looked over the back of a circus and you had these marvelous animal smells and grunts and elephants and we stayed there for a month. Then I tried to get a job. I didn't want to start a family, I was missing my career already, I was being dragged into women's activities that I did not enjoy, and that's another thing: there's tremendous pressure in a place like that. They assume that if you're married but have no children, you're going to participate in all of these volunteer activities or embassy functions and charities. That was no my priority then. So I enrolled at the local university to study Chinese, and also got a job working for a group that provided conference interpreters, guides, et cetera. That lasted two weeks: the Danish Government found out about it and I was told that I would have to resign, a Dane could do the job.

I said, “Look here, I speak French, Spanish, Russian and Chinese, find me a Dane who speaks those languages.” They couldn't but it was just a political thing. The embassy did not help me. It's also interesting that I had to ask the ambassador's permission even to accept that job, I had to write him a formal letter; he could have refused my taking the job, eveprevented me from working at all.

Q: I think that's still true. I know that when I was teaching foreign diplomats in Mozambique in the 80s — maybe it's just "sensitive" ones but I had to get permission to teach the nationals of the Peoples Republic of China.

HARPER: I thought, "this has nothing to do" — because I had resigned from the Service. Then I was offered a job under the table working for an import-export firm but decided I couldn't do it because of my husband's position, I just couldn't afford to be caught. Then I began a battle with the embassy not really helping all that much to get paid for the few weeks that I had worked for the earlier company; everybody just said "oh you shouldn't have done it." But I felt that I was owed the money. Then there was a question of taxes; that was a big problem in Copenhagen, what tax rate I paid. Finally six months later I was compensated.

Denmark in winter is very bleak. There were 15 hours of light — not sunlight, just light — in January, February and March. And in my first year I was just looking for something to get me out in the morning. I found that the ambassador's social secretary was leaving and applied for that job. It was a part-time local-hire job, working for the wife of an ambassador who was political appointee. It was very tough for me, a professional woman, to be watching out that she didn't wear the same dress twice, to work on her menus, handle the servants, write her letters to celebrities and others, check on somebody who was entitled to the title of Her Serene, Princess, whatever. I did that for the two years that we were there together.

In those days, too, there was a lot of entertainment and we didn't even question that you would help your husband entertain. So cook, be a good hostess, make the house look good so that when we had foreign visitors we'd really have a representational situation. And I kept thinking, "Well, well, I'd really like to be back in the Foreign Service." The opportunity didn't present itself because we went off to Bujumbura and there, again there was no job for me. I thought well, I enjoy teaching, so with no benefit of any teaching degrees I applied for a job at the local university teaching English, and was hired. I created

my own programs anreally had a good time. I taught an African history course, in English; and English conversation, English as a foreign language. Then I got a job with the UN training interpreters who were to be assigned to an economic conference, French-English. I set up the program, taught them, had a wonderful group of students, we were all ready for the conference and it got canceled! (laughter) I always wondered what happened to my little interpreters.

That too was an awkward tour, in a way, because I had an ambassador's wife who felt that even though I was teaching — and I was teaching a lot, sometimes 16 hours a week, also writing my own programs, selecting my own materials — I should be stuffing Christmas packages for the Foreign Service nationals' children. We had a terrible confrontation at the German embassy, I remember, when she started yelling at me because I wasn't “pulling my weight.” This was a tremendous embarrassment for all concerned but I think it's a real problem. What was operating there was that assumption that since I had no children and wasn't really working —

Q: Was this after the so-called Directive? This was 1974, right?

HARPER: Yes, this was '74.

Q: This was after the '72 Directive, when they were not supposed to make these requests of you legitimately any more.

HARPER: No. But she felt that I was just not doing my duty, you know, as a wife.

Q: This is something that I have heard many people say, that is, the 1972 Directive did not actually change anything. That the work is still expected, and if you don't do it you're resented, even though it no longer appears in your husband's Efficiency Report.

HARPER: Right. And you're no longer rated as to how well you entertain and how nicely you dress and what an asset you are to him. But I felt the real pressure to do something,

which I resisted, because I felt that if you looked at my contribution to the community, I was doing a lot with the Burundi students, I was certainly teaching a lot about the U.S. just by my very presence. I used to work a lot with our local USIA in getting my course materials, showing films on the U.S.I did my work for U.S. interests in Burundi in other ways.

Q: Oh, yes. You were a whole USIA department all by yourself.

HARPER: As a matter of fact, (she laughs) I pretty much did — I was the one ordering films for my students, and bringing them down, and just using those resources, you know, for the next generation of leaders in that country. Well, anyway, I was upset at her — just her assumption that I wasn't doing my job unless I was — you know, you can find other people to stuff Christmas packages, or to decorate trees, or to dress up as Santa Claus, whatever it was going to be. Burundi was a marvelous tour for us in that it was the only Foreign Service tour where we were friends of the president.It was my 30th birthday party. David had huge stereo speakers which he set up — we were up on a hill facing the town, and the sound was just reverberating all over. And what we didn't know was that the president of the country had a little hideaway up in the hills just two doors away from us.

We woke him up, and all of a sudden the house was surrounded by troops — I saw their shadows surrounding the house, my dog went crazy, and all of a sudden here appeared the president, whose name was Michel Michombero who was deposed, he's now dead. And he said “I'm a guest everywhere in this country” and he just came and enjoyed himself. We had about a hundred guests at the party, a mixture of Burundi and the foreign community — Bujumbura was the kind of place where you knew everybody within five minutes and it was marvelous because you knew both the president and the Greek butcher and everybody socialized together. Anyway, there we were, a hundred people. We roasted the goats in the back yard — in Burundi you eat goats, not lamb — and here came Michombero. He decided he'd have to give a speech, so he got everyone in a circle and he said, (she mimics a magisterial tone of voice) “Remember, Madame David, you can never

lift your shoulder above your ear." I asked a Murundi what that meant, and what it meant was that a wife should always remain subservient to her husband.

Q: Oh-h-h-h, my goodness.

HARPER: It's true! Meanwhile, one of the guards had kicked the dog and she came squealing in, lifting her leg, and disrupted the president's speech. I thought they were ready to kill the dog on the spot, (after laughter) I wasn't sure what was going to happen next. In any case, at 7 a.m. we were all still there, because protocol demanded that no one could leave until the president leave. So he was there, dancing away, drinking too much — everybody drank too much, I'll talk about that later — anyway, finally I got aside a local Murundi businessman and said, "Look here, wouldn't the president like to finish the evening somewhere else?" The sun was up at seven and they took him away.

Well, he would come back and visit us. He'd just drop in. The second time he did that we thought, "Oh, my God, we've got to call the ambassador." So we called the ambassador, David Mark, this wonderful Soviet expert. And David Mark came, and was stuck for eight hours.Well, the president consumed all of our beer. Then we thought, "We'd better get some food in this man," so I asked my cook, a Zairean, who hated Michombero for who knows what reasons, maybe they were ethnic conflicts. And he said, "I won't cook." I said, "Oh yes, you will cook." We did manage to get some food on the table and then some coffee. Eight hours later the ambassador finally could leave because Michombero left, and the ambassador said to my husband, (very sotto voce) "You can handle this on your own the next time!" (both laughing)"Don't call me. I trust you. Just report on it afterwards."

Well, David Mark found out that I had been a Foreign Service officer. So he started to use me totally unofficially to go and talk to people. This was the first inkling I had — now, I wasn't working, my husband and I had worked together a bit in Washington, which was very different because we were working on completely different things and there was no threat. But I could feel just a little resentment already that I was doing something that was

not in my charter, and why is the ambassador sending you off to do this, you know? I could say, Well, I've met this person, I speak excellent French — Burundi had been Belgian colony, they spoke Belgian French — he probably just wants to let me keep my hand in.

Then to add insult to injury I would write it up and it would go off as EMBOFF, embassy officer having done this. I think David Harper resented this. I could feel, too, that our relations as husband and wife suffered from the fact that I was so active professionally, not just in that area but in the other area. There was kind of a sense of competition. And that's something that you can't avoid. I had always thought that perhaps if you were in different fields altogether, you could escape it, but you can't. And if you are treading the same paths, it really is a very tricky thing to handle.

Q: Now, you were admitted back into the Foreign Service later, so that by the time you went to Dakar, you were a tandem spouse.

HARPER: I was a tandem spouse. I was admitted back, though, as a consular officer. That was my price for re-joining the Foreign Service, and it really wasn't my choice, but I decided that yes, it was worth doing. So I came back from Addis Ababa, took the consular course, then went out and pretty much ran the consular section in Dakar for a month, straight out of the consular course. As soon as they had a second consular officer in Dakar, the consul became our Regional consular officer and was moving around, so I did an awful lot of consular work.If you've had consular work, you've had it — my heart was really in political work, so I kept hoping I would get back to it.

The ambassador gave me a chance to be Labor reporting officer too, because he said consular work wasn't substantive and I really should have something substantive to do. I ended up having a very, very heavy tour there.

Q: Did his recognition of your work also contribute to some feelings of jealousy on your husband's part?

HARPER: I think so. I became the ambassador's pet and had a closer relationship with him. I think in large part because of my French — He liked me — I was also his official interpreter when we had visiting CODELs or Assistant Secretaries of Defense, or whoever, and their official interpreter also with the president and the different people they met. So I became very close to the ambassador. In retrospect I think he took advantage of me. I can remember once when he asked me to cook for him. I said, “No, I really don't think I'm going to do that.” I was having a party for a friend of mine, a female diplomat, not an American, who'd gotten pregnant and hadn't quite married her husband yet and I was having an engagement for her because her ambassador had totally rejected her. I was having 85 people at the party to celebrate her engagement. The next day, my ambassador had asked me to cook for him, his reason being that he was going to entertain some Peoples Republic Chinese, and that his cook didn't do American cooking well and he felt I could do good American food. Well, I can, but I really just couldn't do it — a lunch after a big dinner, and I said no. The ambassador was very resentful and he said, “My interests come first.” I said, “I just can't postpone the party.” I also felt he wouldn't ask his male officers to cook.

In any case that was the one time I turned the ambassador down, but on the whole we had an excellent relationship, I certainly learned a lot frohim. I could feel, though, that my husband didn't like the fact that I probably had an easier entr#e to him. At Country Team meetings, as Labor reporting officer I got a lot of recognition because it happened to be a time when labor became an important factor in the country's stability and my labor contacts were giving me some very interesting insights into what was happening, I was writing it up, and Washington was interested. That too became just a little bit too much competition. I felt really that my husband hadn't really gambled on my rising or my being a good professional, it just hadn't occurred to him that that would be so. When he married me I was just starting out, you know —

Q: And he was just starting out, and you were already speaking four languages —

HARPER: But then I had all that time off and he just hadn't bargained on how quickly I'd advance and how well I would get along with other people. That's one thing that being a Foreign Service brat does for you — you settle in fast! You just arrive at a place and you know what it's going to take to get your health going, get the household organized, you know how to run staff and servants, you can pretty much tell what it's going to take to be a woman in that society and to make it work. To be a professional woman in a Islamic African country like Senegal takes a lot — to get these crusty Labor types to talk to you seriously. Of course, you can do it but you just have a little extra advantage through having grown up doing it.

So Dakar was a good tour, except that I was exhausted. I have had something to prove, too, and to my husband and to I think to myself, too. So it was a good tour but I was just totally exhausted and ended up getting medevaced. Which was probably the best thing that ever happened to me because I was able to rest up and catch up. After that I came back and worked here for a year, then decided to have a separated tour to Paris and was able to get just a fantastic job in the Political section working on Africa.

Q: So you finally arrived where you meant to be.

HARPER: I finally arrived where I was meant to be. It was a time where the US was heavily involved in negotiations on Angola. Chad was a big issue, the French Government was working closely with us on that issue, and the kind of job that probably will never happen again, where you made d#marches to the president's son, Jean-Christophe Mitterand. It was a place too where I found that when you're by yourself and you don't have all the other obligations, it really makes a difference. When you're a tandem, you will have to run the household. I've seen very few husbands who truly share in the work load.

Q: It's any kind of career woman's dilemma. No career woman has equity in that.

HARPER: In Dakar I finally got my husband to do the fish and kind of meat shopping at the market. He happened to like the March# Kermel, so he'd go and do that on Saturdays, but the rest of it — just the organizing the household, keeping a staff working the house, getting supplies in, working out the social schedule; and by the time we were in Dakar, I was entertaining my professional contacts and he was entertaining his.

Q: Probably when he was entertaining his, you probably had to do the work.

HARPER: (laughing) Of course I did. I got so that — I finally got him to accept that at some point I would want to have a working lunch at my house and I didn't want him there. That was very hard for him to accept. He would just glower and sit in the study and eat. In Senegal, it was very hard — as a woman you were really much better off inviting people to your house than going to a restaurant; especially if you were entertaining one of your contacts at the Foreign Ministry or whatever, it just set a better tone to do it at home. But if you have the husband there, they're going to defer to your husband — especially if he's of higher rank, they're going to aim it towards — and then if the guest is your contact, he's got tlearn to talk to you and not to call him.I got that worked out but it just took time to arrange and you had to make sure that it didn't inconvenience your husband when you did that.

When I got to Paris, it was all gone, it was very easy to manage, there was really so much more time available to me and an ability to concentrate really on my own job. And going to parties too. If you're a tandem, you're going to his parties as his wife, and then you're going to your parties for your contacts as a professional, and it really doesn't always overlap.

Q: Oh, I'm sure it doesn't. And so you end up going out twice as much as you'd like to.

HARPER: That's right.

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July 10, 1990

Q: Lisa, when we last talked you were discussing your assignment to Paris.

HARPER: Paris was a separated tour for me. I'd realized that my marriage was not going well. I was working in the embassy's Political Section on Africa and it was a dream to be in Paris but working on Africa rather than vice versa. Thinking back over that tour, I guess there again I felt that I had to prove myself. I had not had a tour as a single officer, before. One of the things that you find very soon if you're there single is that first of all, you're put into the very worst housing that they can think of. So I was shown various rabbit warrens and was lucky that the Political Counselor took up my case with Admin so that I finally got a good apartment.

Now, Paris apartments are totally unfurnished. Moving into one was when I needed a wife.Arriving as officer you're expected to hit the ground running, you're supposed to be out working in the embassy, doing your job, going out to receptions at night. So what I did was appeal to my parents and they came and helped me set myself up in all the little things, like finding lighting fixtures or — Paris apartments come with nothing, even the ones the embassy rents. So you have to put in closets. They helped me with that.

I was very lucky to be working for a very good officer, who also helped me get on the social circuit. This is something also that single officers face — unless they establish a really close friendship, they're not going to get the invitations that the ambassador doesn't want, it's probably going to go to a male officer. You have to really fight to say, “I need to be there, too. I can make contacts there, too.” After a while I got so that if one of the officers was going to a party and his wife didn't want to go, he would invite me along with him.

Q: Did this ever make trouble?

HARPER: (laughing) Yes, it did make trouble. There was jealousy. “Why is Lisa getting all the invitations?”

Q: I didn't mean professional jealousy, I meant was there jealousy among the wives, why are there husbands around —

HARPER: No. Wives didn't care, wives at that point were burnt out with receptions. In Paris it was a real struggle, you know, to connect with a husband who was working up to the last minute, then get dressed up, find a parking place or take a cab or take the M#tro, get to the reception; nobody wanted to do it. No problem with the wives. And by then I'd met the wives, I felt really no threat from the wives. They didn't feel threatened in a sexual way, they didn't feel I was after their husband. It was the other people in my section, my fellow officers, male and female. So what I had to do was to share the invitations. Once I got that started, everybody thought “great idea.” I lost out a little bit on that one but I couldn't have gone on all of them.

Q: And it made you friends in the embassy by sharing it.

HARPER: Yes, I made friends. And that's what you have to do, you really have to build up a network. And you also find that in a big place like Paris, single women have a terrible time. I didn't, I had friends in Paris, and I'm resourceful. In small posts you find that there's a social life that's created, but in the big posts, especially the secretaries but also the female officers can be very, very lonely. Nobody is thinking of them. Entertaining is geared to couples; and informal entertaining is not going to include these women who really desperately need to be included. That's why you see so many kind of liaisons between older women and young Marine guards or people who are available. It's something I think the Foreign Service has to think more about.You've got the CLO Office, and it depends on who the CLO is. Maybe the CLO will take care of these people and kind of bring them into

activities, but there really has to be a more systematic reaching out to them. Because what you find is that there are people who'll just go home after work and drink.

This might be a good time to talk about alcoholism. There's a tremendous amount, I think, of drinking that goes on. It's just part of our profession in the Foreign Service. Think about it: You go to something at lunchtime, it's a vin d'honneur, you raise your glass of wine. Okay. In the evenings you'll have a reception. If you're invited to a representational dinner at another embassy, they're going to throw out four or five different kinds of wine, and cognac. Before you know it you are drinking every single night.

Q: This is not just in Paris! Even in the smallest post in Africa.

HARPER: Not just in Paris — anywhere. And Bujumbura. And I'll tell you one thing that's efficiently organized is getting the liquor in. The support flights bring in food. If you're at the end of the earth in Bujumbura or Addis Ababa, your liquor's coming in regularly, and in the hard places, of course maybe there's a rationalization, in a way, to drink. And I think also that we really have been remiss in systematically teaching people how to recognize — I mean, supervisors and people themselves, teaching them to recognize the symptoms of alcoholism. I've had a lot of experience with alcoholics, so I know what to spot. And now I can read a personnel file and can look at certain things and I can tell, “Ah, there may be a drinking problem.” You know, people that come in late to work, especially after a weekend; people who show personality changes — if you're drinking too much you tend really to become bitter against the system, and paranoid. Not that this is a symptom only of alcoholics, but you're going to find, for example, trembling hands in the morning, people who isolate themselves, somebody who wants to go home early and doesn't want to go out. There are people who reorganize their whole lives so that they can drink. In Paris we had problems with people just going home and leaving their safes open.

Q: That could be a real problem.

HARPER: It's a real problem —

Q: Not just a social problem, it's a problem for the institution.

HARPER: It's an institutional problem. And there's also a real reluctance to confront the employee. If it's becoming an office problem, it must be done.

Q: Even if you saw it incipiently, wouldn't early intervention be more successful than waiting until somebody's leaving his safe open?

HARPER: Yes, exactly. I know personally of one case where a wife was drinking at home, she was very unhappy in Paris, and I couldn't get anyone in my upper management to address the fact that this woman was calling her husband every hour on the hour, that she'd been mugged in the M#tro because she was drunk, she was picked up by the police on suspicion of prostitution because she was wandering around in inappropriate clothing but also under the influence of alcohol. You know, there are psychiatrists who can be brought in, it is kept confidential, there is rehabilitation; and yet there's often a conspiracy of silence. And we think we're helping the employee by not telling anyone.

Q: So you think one of the things that should be done is to train anyone in a management position on the appropriate way to respond.

HARPER: That's correct.

Q: First, to recognize it, and then the appropriate way to respond.

HARPER: Because there's a tremendous literature on this subject.

Q: Sure. It's something very well known in the United States.

HARPER: The institution is set up to handle it but it's just not applied enough, or maybe sometimes applied too late. The question of whether or not you can get the person into

treatment is another issue. But I also think there has to be a real effort by employees — this is something you and I talked about — to have functions that don't involve drinking. Just to say, we're going to have a tea party, or we're going to have some kind of an outing or an activity; that we're not just sitting down and drinking.

Q: That reminds me — I remember talking about this before — I asked you if you thought whether the ambassador had an influence on the community, whether he could set an example, or whether he could not attend certain things like the typical Marine beer bash — can the ambassador take the lead in showing people what is regarded as appropriate or inappropriate drinking behavior?

HARPER: Oh, absolutely. I found, for example, in Paris , when I was there our ambassador was a political appointee, who was very religious. He certainly didn't hesitate to set the lead. We had “Christian aerobics” in the embassy, (laughter) it was called Body and Soul and you could go over to the residence twice a week and do your exercises to “Jesus Loves Me” and other songs. So, if you can do that, you can also say, this is an area of concern to me. And usually ambassadors do take the lead in matters like organizing Christmas parties for children and national holidays like Fourth of July. But in my whole life I can recall very few instances where an ambassador has taken the lead to discuss social issues, or societal problems. It doesn't have to be “we've got too many drunks in this embassy.” It can be, “These are questions of concern to me.” You can bring in lecturers, you can have a concert come out or even your regional medical officer come out and have seminars on certain subjects. I've seen it happen —

Q: But there's no policy directing it.

HARPER: Well, I'm not sure what the policy is, there might be but I haven't seen it applied in a systematic way. It has to be periodic, because you have tremendous rotation of personnel, you've got to keep these issues in front of people.

Q: Also, I think people forget. In the United States there's recently been such a decline in drinking, it's now pretty "unfashionable" to drink, as well as to smoke. This isn't the case with other societies overseas. As far as I could tell, there has been at least during the 1980s no significant drop in smoking and drinking among other nationalities.

HARPER: That's right. Especially not among the Frenc(laughing) or any other nationalities. Not to single them out —

Q: I don't think anyone else really has tumbled to this yet. It may be that the people back in the U.S. don't realize the pressures that our personnel are under when they go overseas and drink and smoke and do other kinds of harmful behavior.

HARPER: That's right. In the States, you know you go into a library or book store, there are self-help sections. You have really an effort to educate people on all these problems. This doesn't exist — of course, you don't have feedback from your families overseas. Now, maybe a family member who would say, "Hey, I think you're drinking too much."

Q: Yes. Or even someone to go to. It seems to me another thing that's needed is support for the non-drinking spouse or teenager or whatever. When one member of the family is drinking excessively there's so little support for the non-drinking member — no AlAnon or some such. So they themselves are lacking support and can't do anything to help the person who's drinking too much.

HARPER: That's right. And they're afraid that if they go to a supervisor or a resident doctor, somehow the husband's career will suffer for it. The word has to go out that "this is confidential."

Q: And that there are channels you should go through. People need to be trained in that before going overseas.

HARPER: That's right.

Q: And at periodic intervals. Maybe somebody could have something like this when they're a junior officer but they sort of forget it after ten years. Well, when they get another course in mid-career, it ought to be reenforcing.

HARPER: I think we've done very well in recognizing, for instance, the tensions that children are under when they come back from overseas — you know, the sort of societal disconnect. But I don't see the same sort of attention given to alcoholism.

Q: There isn't much for spouses, either. My feeling was that when you returned to the States, you were supposed to deal with culture shock on your own. It was often very disorienting.

HARPER: Yes. But now my colleagues with children tell me that there's an attempt to bring the children together, so that they have dances to go to when they come home, and there are support groups —

Q:There are good ones for the children, bu(she laughs) I don't think there's anything for the spouses.

HARPER:Yes! The services are there, the plumbing is there but you have to encourage them to draw the spouses in. I mean, there's a wonderful computerized network for spouses who want to find jobs and use their skills. But the word has to go out that this is available, it has to really be more of an outreach. You don't always know your entitlements or what's available here.

Q: Another burning issue, which is not so much from your Paris experience or any of it since Dakar but from your earlier years, is this whole idea of recompense for the spouse for her effort. As you said, in Dakar you were not only doing your own job, you also had to be the support system for your husband's job. What are your feelings about paying spouses?

HARPER: I do think that spouses who are now working in an intra-embassy job but who are helping their husbands by entertaining, should be paid. There's a lot of debate about how this would be done, but I'm aware that a lot of other foreign services do pay the wives. I think there's no question the institution benefits. If you've been to some dinner parties where the working wife has said the husband has gone down to the local Chinese restaurant and brought back carry out, you're not going to make the same impression as the woman who stayed at home, cooked a home-made American meal, set up her table, and put on a first-class performance. And I think, also, you'd eliminate a lot of resentment. I mean, there's a generation of women who really resent being asked to do these things. In my day, you were just expected to do it. I think that even some kind of non-monetary recognition would help a little bit. But certainly money, too. The way I would see it, I don't think you want the wife to feel like she's an employee, because chances are if she's chosen not to have a full time job outside the embassy now because she preferred that way of life, you don't want to tie her into something where she feels obligated to work 40 hours a week. But a contractual arrangement where she gets paid so much per hour for her contributions to the community — and I think we'd have to carefully define what is a community involvement. Charity work where she's representing the U.S.? Entertaining? Diplomatic wives' meetings? These are things that really do help. And there's also no doubt in my mind that a wife who's willing to go to the diplomatic wives' meeting is going to help her husband make the sort of contacts in the community that are going to help his career. We should tap into this. We should help these women, also, to have a little more feeling of self-worth in the process. I tell you, it's very hard on you — and I can say this because I've been non-employed wife overseas. Just to have someone say, “Oh, you're just a housewife...” Well, after a while you start feeling like — just a housewife. There you are, your efforts are being recognized for what they're worth.

Q: Some people have suggested that one way to do it would be to give Social Security credits for that time, to be included in whatever you earn in Social Security by working in

the U.S. during stateside tours. You could eventually build up to having some real equity in the system.

HARPER: Right. We now have “former spouse legislation” so that if you were married and helped your husband overseas, you do get some recompense if you divorce. But that is probably not enough.

Q: No, but it helps a lot. When I was in that situation and resented going to those diplomatic wives' meetings, I was told to get out there and earn my pension. But I went with a happier heart because I felt I would get recognition. But I agree with you , it's the recognition that is very, very important. You need to have some status so that you have some self-esteem.

HARPER: That's right. Also to motivate you to do your very best at this job.Because there's a minimal performance and there's a maximum performance.If you're being paid for it, you're probably going to give more.

Q: Not only would you get paid, you would also get the recognition in the form of some kind of efficiency report. And your efficiency report would go in your dossier, and that would be an even more powerful motivator, I think, to do your best.

HARPER: Right. Then, also, if you have to reenter the job market when you come back to the States, you have at least documented what you have done. I read about a Foreign Service spouse who's now doing wonderful dinners for the National Gallery. Well: this is a direct use of what she learned overseas. I think there are a lot of other wives there who entertain at a high level who could provide the same service, but to get a foot in the door in the job market they need other people's word that they've done it.

Q: It take(laughing) a lot of executive ability to put on a high-level dinner.

HARPER: That's right. I think this is not an issue that's going to go away, either. Okay, we're going to have women who for love of their husbands are going to drop out during a certain period, raise their children, but let's use them. This is a resource, not a problem, it's a resource to be utilized. I think the Foreign Service has thought of it as a problem, that “spouses aren't willing to work as much any more.”

Q: No. It just has to be done differently, structured differently. What do you think about the Tandem Couples program as far as you've been able to observe it and from your own experience?

HARPER: Well, it's not working well, I see the hopes of a few years ago diminishing, I see a lot of frustration on the part of management because, basically, now, you have to opt for whose career takes precedence. What this means in practice, in every case that I've seen and no doubt there are others, is that the wife suffers: her career suffers. She makes the best of it, she says, okay, I'm still working. But I see more and more tendency to say, “Okay, you said you'd be available world-wide, we need you here, we need you there.” A split-up couple is not what they bargained for.

Q: No, it's not tandem.

HARPER: It's not tandem. I don't have any solution for this one, except that there too I think we tend to look at tandems as a problem. I hear a lot about how the rights of single officers are being violated because a tandem is taking a slot that could have gone to a single or to a marrieperson whose spouse is not working in the Foreign Service. I really think we need to have a fresh look at it. It can work, and we're all supposed to be multi-talented. In most embassies people are doing at least one job, one discipline. You can also be recycled to do some- (end of tape)

Q: Do you think we'll look to work in other [agencies]?

HARPER: Not only that. I think it's time to look at the benefits of tandems. As tandem you get a cheaper deal: they're both living together, that means one less housing unit to provide. And moving costs. In Third World countries, you have two people who are committed to making an awful assignment work. I found, too, that tandems are more readily accepted in hardship posts. If you're both in Addis Ababa or Ouagadougou or whatever, fine, nobody's fighting for those jobs and you have two people who can help — you know, if you're in a place that's perhaps especially politically difficult, you're going to have a built-in support system right there to help you, and you're not going to be as lonely, and you're not going to be as vulnerable as somebody who's just out there —

Q: Certainly not as vulnerable as a single person, or as a married person whose wife is thinking "why did you drag me to this godforsaken place, why couldn't you get Paris?"

HARPER: That's right, because a tandem knows why they're there. They have two jobs, she has a stake in it, and she's going to make it work. Actually, my whole feeling is, that right now for it to work, it's the wife who "has to make it work." It's the woman officer who usually — you know, opting for whose career takes precedence means, in fact, that it's usually the husband's. There are some exceptions out there but I found too that men who have made the choice to be Number Two, are looked down upon by their male colleagues, they're made fun of.

Q: Oh, I've seen that in the business world.

HARPER: I find that there's a real reluctance to give the woman part of the partnership the better of the two jobs.

Q: And for it to work, women have to realize that this is the situation and not bang their heads against that wall too hard.

HARPER: I think for now there's a certain amount of sacrifice that just goes with the territory.

Q: It's not that different from being a working wife in the States, after all. Most women in the U.S. have the responsibility of running a household in addition to their career.

HARPER: That's true. But there you just have the added burden of making it work overseas. The whole infrastructure you can count on — in a lot of countries I've been in, the shops are closed on Sundays or they close at 7pm. Just getting enough food on the table — you have to take time off to set up a dinner party, and most of the time it's the wife who does it. I've seen very few husbands who truly share 50/50 in terms of living part of it.

Q: The same as in our society, of course. It's not going to be that much different overseas.

HARPER: No. And also, the problem of couples who're just living for the work and who leave very little time for themselves. This is when you start seeing tremendous tensions in the marriage. Each one is out there doing their job and they don't spend enough time together to keep the marriage going. I think, too, supervisors have a role to play there, to call in the officers and say, “Look here, take time for yourself.” Not to expect so much. Just to tell them at some point, “Take a vacation together.” We're still pretty much workaholics. We're Americans and we work hard but there's a point where you have to give permission to your tandem just to go off.

Q: That's right, because I'm sure they're out there busily proving themselves, that this can work, that it's not going to be a liability for either one of them, especially not for the man, et cetera, et cetera.

HARPER: Yes. Because there's a feeling on the part of the older generation that you're getting two for the price of one. You do one for the price of two, in effect; that you're not

getting two full officers' performance out of the tandem. So there's a pressure to produce —

Q: I think, given the statistics I've heard, namely that something like 50 percent of our Foreign Service officer group are unmarried—you were telling me before we began taping how some people have coped with this.

HARPER: Well, now there's more acceptance of people who don't marry. I know of one Foreign Service couple who waited five years to marry because she was not ready to give up her job. She was a reporter, he was Foreign Service, and they lived together. Finally, of course she made the sacrifice and went off to this godforsaken country with him and just accepted that she would put her career on hold for a while. I think a lot of people just figure that maybe marriage and a Foreign Service career are incompatible.

Q: I'm beginning to think so myself! (both laughing) It's a great shame. There are so many things undermining it, though.

HARPER: In Addis Ababa I almost sensed a deliberate policy of sending single people there because they would be less problems to administer - you know, no fuss, no children, no wives.So you had an embassy that was staffed almost exclusively with single people.

Q: Do you see any negative aspects to that? What if we had a basically single Foreign Service?

HARPER: Yes, I do. I think, first of all, for just the emotional stability, in many cases it's simply — I think also that most people do want to get married and this will be a goal. If you have to sacrifice one of your goals, it's always going to be very difficult. Maybe you're not going to be wholeheartedly for your job. Another thing: it gives a very skewed idea of American society. We're representing American society and we should have the full diversity — single people, married people, people with children. I think also that single people entertain differently. We need to have — this is all generalizations, but chances are

married people are going to get more involved in the community than single people who are probably going out more one on one. I just think it's unhealthy to have only one choice there.

Q: What do you think the Foreign Service could do to make it easier on married people, whether tandems or not?I mean, we've made a lot of suggestions — recognizing the wife's contributions, having counseling for alcoholism. Going back to your experiences as a child you said that there have been a lot of changes, a lot of progress made in handlinchildren's problems but can you think of anything in that realm that you would like to see improved?

HARPER: I think it's not so much for the children overseas, except to make parents aware that they have to carry America with them. It's very important for children to have American rituals. To make sure that the children learn to speak good English. I know it would have been much easier for me if my parents had taught me to write English. It's great to be in a French school but when you come home, if you can't write your own language and you have no sense of composition, you're going to be at a real disadvantage. And to make you feel like an American.I think also you've got to worry that when people come back, there is a problem of transition. Almost any child who's been raised overseas is going to have a hard time with his U.S. peers. You are different. You're probably more sophisticated, you certainly dress differently, you talk differently, you're interested in different things. And the parents have to be there to talk it over and to put the child together with other children who've gone through the same experience. So that there isn't this total culture clash. I think it's also important to plan so that the child has four good years of high school in one place, preferably in America. The child who's going to go to college in America has to have an American high school experience.

Q: And barring that, at least a U.S.-accredited school overseas.

HARPER: Yes. Because if that's the society you're going to live in, well then that's an investment I think has to be made. And I'm looking at a lot of my friends who've been to

foreign schools until they went to college, and then have had a difficult time adjusting to life in America. It's just a real transition. You go through the French school system and then all of a sudden, BAM, you're thrown into an American university environment, and while academically you may be far ahead, socially you're just not going to fit in.

Q: You had the whole four years in high school in the U.S.?

HARPER: Yes, an(she laughs) I wasn't a perfect fit with America even then bu(she laughs again) I'm not blaming the Foreign Service for that!

Q: I think you adapted very well to college life.

HARPER: So much can be done just talking about it with a child. I do think that Foreign Service parents don't tal— this is another great generalization but I remember my father's always been absent and not there to talk when I was growing up. You think of a Foreign Service officer's life: he comes home, changes, runs off to a reception; or he's late drafting his telegrams at night. There really has to be more time just to go home and be with the kids.

Q: He often has to work on the weekend, go in on Saturday and draft more telegrams, and sometimes you're in places where the work week is different from the one in the States and you have to be there to make sure your cables get out on Monday.

HARPER: That's right. And to really look at your child critically, you know. My brother had a learning disability but, of course, he was in French schools and they just thought he was retarded. When he came back to the U.S., his intelligence proved normal but he was dyslexic. In those days, the therapy was called “remedial reading” and after four years of that he was okay. But I think the problem probably would have been diagnosed earlier if my parents had been more careful about just... And we were left mainly in the care of nannies.

Q: A big temptation overseas, because the parents are so busy, and it's so easy to get child care.

HARPER: And once we came back to the States, my mother became a traditional mother again, she was wonderful, she was home every day when we came home. But that wasn't the pattern when I was growing up in Paris. There was just such an all-enveloping social life that took so much of her attention.

Q: That can be true even in a small post. You can have a very busy social life, sometimes even more so. The most hectic social life we ever had was in Mozambique. There was such a dearth of information that people thought they had to get together socially every evening and compare notes. I imagine this was the case in Bujumbura and similar posts.

HARPER: Yes. In Bujumbura it was just constant — you didn't have all the things like television, and in those days no videos. We had reels that the Air Force or Army would send us, old movies that by the time they reached us would break halfway throug(laughing). But there was nothing to do except socialize, and people socialized with other adults and the children were left with the maids. It's also not just a question of their missing their parents but also the children are missing out intellectually in a lot of these places. You know, you're with an African servant who can't read or write —

Q: And who may have some very bizarre prejudices.

HARPER: That's right.

Q: I know that when my kids were little their nannies were telling them things that I thought were very superstitious and untrue. And the children couldn't distinguish. If I hadn't caught it, they could have grown up very warped.

HARPER: Or they learned the local language at the sort of servant level rather than learning to speak it in a useful way that would serve them in a useful way later on.

Q: It's very hard. I can't imagine what happens when somebody who's a tandem wife has a child, too.

HARPER: That's very difficult, because there you have the pressure to not let it affect you. It's a perception thing. There's very little sympathy for a tandem wife who has sick children, so tandem wives will just do anything so that nobody says, “Oh, well, she took two weeks off to get her children settled into school.” I've seen different ways of handling that. I have a friend, part of a tandem, who travels with a Thai couple at great financial expense to them, but she said she couldn't work knowing her children were not being cared for by someone who would know whom to call. The couple speaks English, always knows how to take care of a child in any emergency.Not everybody can do this. It's just a tremendous pressure. You're always torn. And there again, in my experience it's the woman who bears the brunt of that.Always worrying about the children and getting them equipped for school, clothed, and all the things you have to do.

I think somehow there has to be some talk — it's very difficult for a young couple to work these things out. Young couples think, oh, love is grand, love's going to solve everything. And I think also some talking to them about the problems of tandems, so they can recognize the danger signals, if they're listening, just so it's in the back of their minds. And there's plenty of literature on this subject, too. What are the stresses on a tandem family? What can you do? And to let the husband and the wife, too, she really has set expectations and the standards from the beginning. I know this from personal experience: you can't try to change the rules at mid-term. It's very difficult to do that.

Q: That probably should be engraved in stone over every key officer's door.

HARPER: Right. And the truth of the matter is, too, that as you grow older you have less energy. You have boundless energy at the beginning, and enthusiasm, and you can do it, sure, you can do it all. But then after a while you start having health problems, you grow resentful. But then, there you are, your husband says, “Well, my goodness, you never

objected to doing all the shopping before, and all the direction of the servants, what's going on now?”

Q: That's when they get rid of the old wife and get a new wife, a young wife. (both laughing)

HARPER: Probably a foreigner, who they think will be more compliant!

Q: That's right, I bet there's a lot of that.

HARPER: So just to deal with the educational problem — not that that's going to solve it but that's just one little thing to do, and to get those rules of the game established early on in a relationship, and see if it works, and think twice about marrying the guy — I mean, even discuss it before marriage, think twice about it. Because what happens too often, and this is talking from personal experience with friends, is that they'll meet the man of their life, who'll say, “Sure! I'm all for your career” but he really doesn't mean it. What he means is, “Well, if it suits me, that'll be fine.”

Q: “I want something to brag about to my friends.”

HARPER: Yes. He likes it, he likes the extra money, certainly he likes the prestige of having a wife who's a professional woman, but when it comes time to, “But, I want to go to Ouagadougou, Honey, what do you mean there's no job for you there? Well, of course, you'll take a leave-of-absence.” I know of an engagement broken off, by a friend of mine, because the husband-to-be had just neglected to tell his fianc#e that he'd accepted a job —

Q: (laughing) It just seems like a little oversight.

HARPER: — and a job that was going to make it impossible for her to work at their first post. It was devastating to her but she broke the engagement. She also saw this as a flagrant lack of trust. This is 1989.

Q: Knowing what I know, that seems outrageous even by the usual standards.

HARPER: But there are still a lot of people who will talk one day. And also a lot of men who pretend to be liberated but who really aren't, and they're the most dangerous, (both laugh heartily) because they've learned all the right tunes but you'll never get them to sing them in public. So picking the right mate sure pays off for a tandem assignment. But if you're going to go into that, if you're thinking about it, you've really got to make sure the man is all for it. And that you bid together and just see what develops. I think also that if you're a tandem you have to lobby for assignments in a way tha— well, you always have to lobby for assignments but you really have to think way ahead on where you want to do and find prospects. And you're probably going to have to stay longer in a post than you'd choose to otherwise, because it's a temptation. You've got twjobs, you're probably going to keep them; and that's another area where tandems suffer. Of course, not to mention when you reach a very senior level, then, forget it, it's impossible.

Q: Then you really would have to have separated assignments.

HARPER: I gues(heavy sigh) those are my thoughts for today.

***

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: David Harper (Divorced)

Spouse Entered Service: c. 1965You Entered Service: 1971Left Service: 1989

Status: FS offspring, Tandem Spouse, FS Spouse

Posts:As FS dependent:

1952-56Paris, France

1963-64Saigon, Vietnam

1966Brussels, Belgium (also local hire at embassy)As spouse:

1970-72Copenhagen, Denmark

1974-77Bujumbura, Burundi

1978-82Addis Ababa, EthiopiaAs tandem spouse:

1982-85Dakar, Senegal

1986-88As FSO: Paris, France

Spouse's Position: political officer, with one tour as economic/commercial officer

Place and date of birth: July 23, 1945, Boston, Massachusetts

Maiden name: Manfull

Parents:

Ambassador Melvin L. Manfull, FSO Retired

Suzanne D. Manfull, housewife

Schools: Brown University, BA 1966

Date/Place of Marriage: September 19, 1969, Brussels Belgium

Profession: Foreign Service Officer, linguist

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:At Post:

Saigon* Volunteered to help social welfare organizations of Buddhistand Catholics

Copenhagen* Hired locally as social secretary to ambassador's wife

Bujumbura* English teacher at the University of Bujumbura, UN contracemployee

Addis Ababa* French teacher at ECA; French/English translator for ECWomen's Bureau

Dakar* Consular officer

Paris* Political officer

In Washington, D.C.:1963Escort interpreter, State Department Language Service

Honors:

Awarded FS scholarship to Barnard College, but declined

Spanish, Russian prizes in high school

Spanish prize in college

End of interview